DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 343 942 TM 018 119

TITLE	DANTES: A Testing Program That Can Help Your Institution Attract Able Students by Awarding Credit for What They Know.
INSTITUTION	Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N.J.
PUB DATE	89
NOTE	11p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adults; Certification; College Admission; *Equivalency Tests; Experiential Learning; Higher Education; Knowledge Level; *Military Personnel; Military Training; *Nontraditional Education; *Prior Learning; Scoring; Standardized Tests; *Student Placement; Test Construction; *Testing Programs
IDENTIFIERS	*Defense Activity Non Traditional Education Support

ABSTRACT

The Defense Activity for Nontraditional Education Support (DANTES) Program is a testing service conducted by the Educational Testing Service for DANTES, an agency of the Department of Defense. DANTES' mission is to help service members obtain credit for knowledge and skills acquired through non-traditional educational experiences. Since World War II, DANTES has sponsored and administered tests that provide qualified military personnel with the opportunity to obtain academic credit, gain admission to college, and receive professional certification on the basis of independent study and job experiences. In 1983, the program was made available to all United States colleges and universities, giving civilian students the opportunity to participate. The DANTES Subject Standardized Tests are a series of about 50 tests in a variety of introductory college-level academic, vocational, and business subjects, including tests in applied technology. Test development, administration, scoring, and use are discussed in this program brochure. The American Council on Education has reviewed the DANTES test development procedures, and has approved minimum passing scores and the amount of credit that should be awarded for each test. (SLD)

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DANTES

A testing program that can help your institution attract able students by awarding credit for what they know

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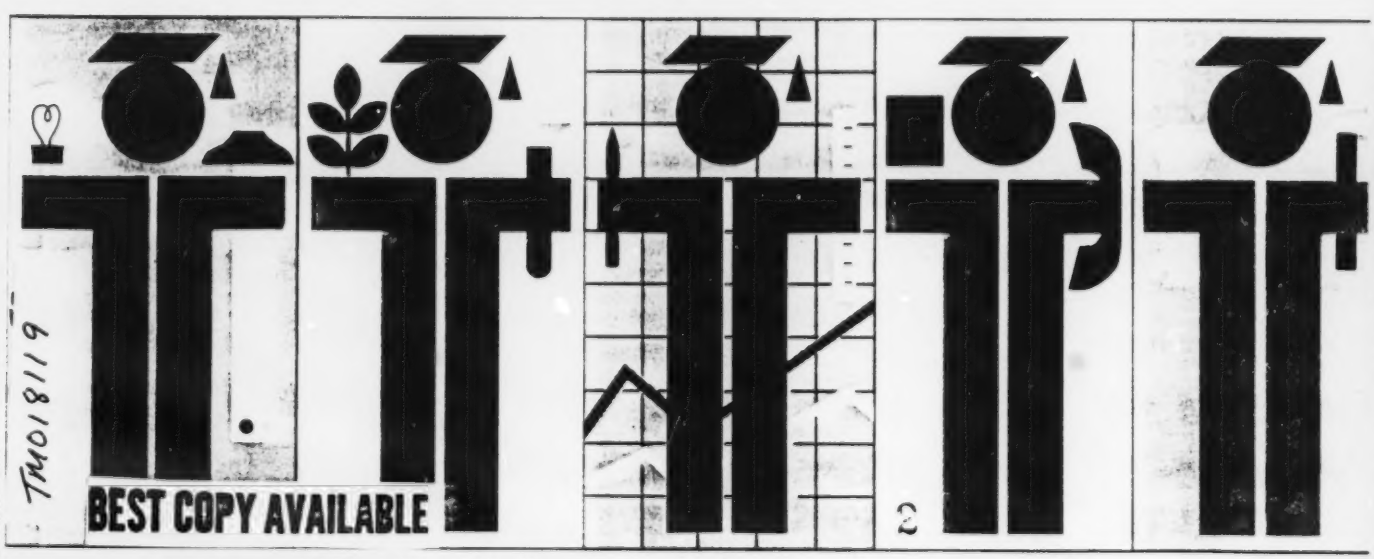

TM018119

Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey 08541

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What is the DANTES Program?

The DANTES Program is a testing service conducted by Educational Testing Service (ETS) for DANTES, an agency of the Department of Defense. The name DANTES stands for Defense Activity for Nontraditional Education Support, and DANTES' mission is to help service members obtain credit for knowledge and skills acquired through nontraditional educational experiences. Since World War II, DANTES has sponsored and administered tests that provide qualified military personnel with the opportunity to obtain academic credit, gain admission to college, and receive professional certification on the basis of independent study and job experiences.

In 1983, the DANTES credit-by-examination program was made available for the first time to all American colleges and universities, giving them the opportunity to offer college credit to deserving civilian students. The DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSSTs) are a series of about 50 tests in a wide range of introductory college-level academic, vocational/technical, and business subjects. Some are subjects that people may have studied as a special interest: astronomy, anthropology, and foreign languages, for example. There are also tests covering material that people may have learned on the job: financial accounting, banking, personnel supervision, insurance, law enforcement, technical writing, and so forth. A special feature of the DANTES Program is that it includes a number of tests in applied technology, such as television theory and circuitry, electric circuitry, and basic automotive service.

How does DANTES attract able students?

Institutions that adopt the DANTES credit-by-examination program gain a competitive edge over other institutions in attracting students because:

- DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSSTs) provide a way for an institution to assess incoming students' knowledge of material commonly taught in college courses. To receive academic credit for their knowledge, these students must know as much as students who have taken the course. Students who succeed on DANTES exams are ready to continue at an advanced level.
- Research studies of students who have received credit by examination show that they do better academically, take more advanced courses, and are more motivated to complete their course of study than other students.
- Returning students are usually committed to completing their degrees and are more likely to select an institution that will save them time and money by awarding them credit for what they already know.

What benefits does DANTES offer your institution?

Because DANTES tests are prepared by Educational Testing Service and are approved by the American Council on Education (ACE), your institution is assured of consistent high quality.

The DANTES Program provides valid and reliable test instruments. ETS's experience in test development ensures that test scores will accurately and objectively reflect college-level knowledge in the subject area being assessed. ETS not only develops the tests, but also oversees their distribution, security, and scoring.

Another benefit of the program is that it can reduce the amount of time and money your institution spends on developing and administering tests. Faculty can be freed from the time-consuming tasks of developing competency tests and evaluating students' performance on them.

Some specific advantages over such in-house tests are:

- There is consistency within your testing program.
- ETS's stringent security precautions ensure that students do not have prior access to tests.
- ETS's quality-control procedures ensure that score results are both valid and reliable.
- For schools that prefer to set their own standards for credit awards, ETS will provide materials and technical assistance for standard-setting administrations.

What support services are offered by Educational Testing Service?

Each school that adopts the DANTES Program uses only tests that are suited to its curriculum, sets its own fee for test administration, sets its own testing schedule, and administers the tests. ETS provides tests, answer sheets, and directions for administering the tests and for returning materials.

Schools using the DANTES Program obtain test materials and scores quickly and easily via ETS's customer service system. Orders for test materials can be placed through ETS's special toll-free telephone number (800-257-9484). Orders placed by 11:30 a.m. (Princeton, New Jersey, time) are shipped via United Parcel Service the same day.

Ordinarily, score reports are sent out from five to ten working days after ETS receives the answer sheets. Unofficial score reports can be given by telephone within 24 hours after ETS receives the answer sheets. Requests to expedite scoring can be made via ETS's toll-free number.

ETS provides free of charge supplies of DANTES publications that are designed to help schools promote the program. Current materials for schools include: press releases, radio news releases, ads for newspapers, and posters. Also provided are brochures and fact sheets/study guides for schools to distribute to students.

What does participation in the DANTES Program involve?

To participate in the DANTES Program, institutions must sign a letter that states that they will maintain the security and confidentiality of the tests and results, administer the tests properly, and pay $25 for each test that is administered. Bills are issued monthly. A discount is available if more than 250 tests are administered during the academic year. The school determines the charge to students. Any administrative costs an institution incurs can be recovered by means of the fee charged to students. There is no obligation to administer a specified number of tests during the year or to make a commitment for a specified number of administrations.

After a test administration, each student's test book and answer sheet are returned to ETS. Scoring takes place twice a week. Two score reports are automatically provided: one for the student and one for the institution. ETS maintains a permanent transcript file through which students or institutions may obtain additional transcripts.

For each test, ETS provides a fact sheet/study guide containing the following information: a description of the test content, sample questions typical of those encountered on the test, the American Council on Education recommended minimum scores and credit awards, the number of questions that must be answered correctly to reach the recommended minimum score, and a list of publications that are appropriate for study.

DANTES is a "testing-on-demand" program—one that has no fixed dates for administration of the tests. The school determines the testing schedule. Most DANTES tests are untimed, so students are allowed to work as long as necessary. The tests usually take about 90 minutes to administer. Because there are no separately timed sections, a DANTES test can be administered simultaneously with other DANTES tests or with tests from other programs. Most tests are multiple-choice.

How do DANTES tests differ from CLEP tests?

Both DANTES and CLEP (College Level Examination Program) are ETS-developed testing programs used for granting credit for previously acquired college-level knowledge. The two programs can be considered complementary because each of them provides credit-by-examination testing on subjects not covered by the other.

- Most of the titles in each of the programs are unique.
- DANTES offers tests in a wide variety of technological subjects such as electronics and technical writing; CLEP tests do not cover these subjects.
- DANTES has one test appropriate for the first semester of credit in Spanish, German, and Italian and a different test for the second semester; CLEP language tests include material taught during the first two semesters of language study and offer credit for two or four semesters. Italian is not included in the CLEP program.
- DANTES offers a wide range of tests in the sciences including Astronomy, Physics, and Geology.

- In addition to the business titles that CLEP offers, DANTES offers tests in Insurance, Personnel/Human Resource Management, and Introduction to Business.

The framework for DANTES testing differs, however, from that of CLEP Subject Exams:

- DANTES tests generally cover one semester of an introductory course; CLEP tests often cover an entire year of work.
- Most DANTES tests are not timed; CLEP tests have separately timed sections.
- DANTES tests can be obtained at any time and can be administered at any time; CLEP tests that are part of the national CLEP program have specified administration dates.

How are DANTES tests developed?

For all its testing programs, including DANTES, ETS follows the same rigorous test development procedures. The cornerstone of the procedure is faculty involvement. Faculty test committees, composed of people teaching the course for which the new test is intended, are drawn from a variety of postsecondary institutions including public and private two- and four-year institutions. These committees of three to five members work with ETS test development professionals at every stage of the test development process.

The foundation on which all ETS tests are constructed is test specifications, which determine what material will be covered. Faculty committees ensure that the subject matter covered on a particular test will be representative of what is covered in the course for which credit is to be awarded. To determine the content of the curriculum as it is taught throughout the United States, the committee and ETS test development staff study the most commonly used textbooks or survey faculty currently teaching the course or both. Using this information, the committee and ETS staff draft test specifications and prepare sample questions and a list of reference books (texts). For some specialized areas—carpentry or personnel/human resource management, for example—in which test development personnel do not have the requisite background, a collaborator who is currently teaching the subject is appointed.

Once the draft specifications, sample questions, and list of reference books have been prepared, the faculty committee reviews them. Committee members revise these materials as needed to make them representative of the curriculum.

Questions for the test are then written in accordance with the revised specifications. Each question is reviewed by the committee and checked for clarity and accuracy. Any revisions that are needed are made by the committee with ETS assistance.

The faculty committee ranks the questions by difficulty level to provide ETS staff with a guide for assembling the test. The test assembler is responsible for seeing that the test meets the specifications. After the test is assembled, the ETS test

assembler and other ETS professionals conduct a series of reviews. The most significant are listed below.

ETS Test Specialist's Review. Test questions are reviewed for quality, clarity, balance, and appropriateness by an independent expert in the field who has not been involved in the development of the test.

ETS Test Editors' Review. Experienced test editors then review the test for style, usage, and clarity.

ETS Sensitivity Review. Sensitivity reviewers who have received special training review the tests to ensure that the tests reflect the contributions and experiences of women and minorities and that no offensive material has been included.

Committee Members' Review. Test committee members review final copy of tests to check for accuracy and to ensure that tests meet specifications.

After the test is developed, ETS administers it to a national sample of students who are currently completing a course for credit in that subject. Usually, instructors give the test to their students as a final examination. The answer sheets are scored at ETS, data are collected for each question and for the test as a whole, and the statistics are analyzed. Faculty members are asked to supply the grades they would give students if the test score were not included. The correlation between test scores and grades is reviewed at ETS to ensure that the tests are accurately measuring student performance. Also, reliability, difficulty, and other test statistics are generated. Based on these analyses, the final form of the test is produced. No test is released for use until all data are collected and analyzed and the results indicate that the test effectively measures competence in the subject.

What scale is used to report scores on DANTES tests?

The scores provided by the national norming sample are put on a standard score scale that has a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. Scaled scores are used because they always signify the same thing regardless of the test form taken. ACE recommendations for amount of credit to be given are based on these scaled scores. The scaled scores range from a low of 20 to a high of 80. Scaled scores obtained from two different forms of a subject test have the same meaning, so they can be compared. Scaled scores for tests in different subjects do not have the same meaning and cannot be compared.

Information about the norming sample and the statistics obtained (reliability, course grade/score correlations, standard error of measurement, and so forth) are included in the fact sheet/study guide that is developed for each test.

Each test form has a unique formula for converting the raw score to the scaled score, so it is not possible to work back from a scaled score to

learn the number of responses answered correctly. The fact sheet also includes the number of questions the student must answer correctly to reach the minimum passing score for each test.

Additional technical, statistical, and content information for each DANTES test is available from ETS upon request.

How is the minimum passing score for a DANTES test determined?

The ACE recommended minimum passing score is made equal to the average score of students in the DANTES norming sample who received a grade of C for the course. The ACE recommendation is based on the premise that a student who knows as much as students who receive an A or B (or equivalent numerical grade) in a course should pass the DANTES test and that a student whose knowledge is comparable to those who receive a D or F should take the course. Students who score above the average score for C students should also receive credit, but those below that score should not. Therefore, the score is set at the average score attained by C students.

What does approval by the American Council on Education signify?

The DANTES Program at ETS makes use of up-to-date psychometric practices and procedures that meet the highest standards established for testing. The American Council on Education (ACE), a respected independent organization, has reviewed ETS's test development procedures and has found that they exceed ACE requirements. Based on their review of ETS's procedures, ACE recommends a minimum passing score and the amount of credit that should be awarded for each test.

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